



CRAIG HICKMAN 2022-09-15

MACHIAVELLI AND SADE: OUR FUTURE AS PURE ABSTRACTION

NECROPOLITICS INHUMAN, PESSIMISM, SADE, TECHNOLOGY

*"What was the use of seeing things clearly if the only
thing clarity brought was a new and deeper darkness?"*

— Alberto Moravia

*We now 'see' that technocommercial systems, whose catallactic being is strictly analogous to a
convergent wave, belong indubitably to the world of horror, and await their cinematographers.*

—Nick Land, *Phyl-Undhu: Abstract Horror, Exterminator*

Machiavellianism and Sadism are no longer theoretical forms we can critique, they've become our world, a world in which we cannot think anything different than the cruel abstractions of the inhuman, anti-human, and tyranny of a computational or algorithmic civilization which is shaping us into its own cruel modes of anti-life and undying in a post-death society. To speak of the human is a quaint nostalgia. We've become so immersed in our need to escape the human with its connections to ancient forms of anthropomorphism that we gladly enter the abstractions of our own virtual prisons. Soon the label human will be forgotten as a mythology of a creature that once roamed the wilds of industrial civilization. Our posthuman progeny will look back upon our kind as neither the progenitors nor the gods of their destinies. No. Their completion as absolute abstractions will leave them utterly impersonal and indifferent to our affective relations and worlds. We can hear their laughter now: the Machiavellian Sadism of the future world of pure abstract horror. Death has never seemed sweeter.

"The dark realization came to him that a difficult and miserable age had begun for him, and he couldn't imagine when it would end."

— Alberto Moravia

Alberto Moravia speaks of the names we give theory to as aspects of the human that become part and staple of something long known but left in the hinterlands of our critical and imaginal forms: "The world of mankind is unitary, and every time one idea becomes pre-eminent over others it tends irresistibly to go beyond its proper field and enter others with which it has nothing in common."

"I felt that the metal of my spirit, like a bar of iron that is softened and bent by a persistent flame, was being gradually softened and bent by the troubles that oppressed it."

— Alberto Moravia

As he will suggest, both Machiavelli and Sade gave labels to a certain tendency of cruelty that would be attached to politics and love respectively, but then would enter the dark declivities of every aspect of our human world to the point of saturation. "On the other hand, just as Sadism, whether in de Sade's books or in current practices, is not confined to the strictly erotic field but seems to invest all human activities, so Machiavellianism is no longer a merely political affair. It is no longer concerned, as in Machiavelli's day, with what to do so as to win and consolidate political power, for it invests all relationships between men, political and non-political." (Alberto Moravia, *Man as an End*)

I've been working through the notion of a Machiavellian Sadism – this pervasive parody of love, cruelty, and political despair in a world-without-us, a non-human world devoid of human consciousness but alive to the animate vibrancy of life in phantasmagorias of love and death.

When we as humans envision a world-without-us we enter into that strange realm that Lovecraft once spoke of saying: "Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or

“outsideness” without laying stress on the emotion of fear. The reason why time plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. Conflict with time seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression.”

This notion that we are at war with Time is not unique to Lovecraft but has been a part of the stock and trade of poetry for millennia along with its enemy, philosophy. The notion of the Great Filter is one such notion of our conflict with time.

“The Great Filter, remember, is the horror-genre-adaptation of Fermi’s Paradox. All of our calculations say that, in the infinite vastness of time and space, intelligent aliens should be very common. But we don’t see any of them. [...] Why not? [...] Well, the Great Filter. No [one] knows specifically what the Great Filter is, but generally it’s ‘that thing that blocks planets from growing spacefaring civilizations.’” As it develops, however, the post deliberately retreats from abstraction, into an enumeration of already-envisaged, and thus comparatively concrete menaces. After running through various candidates, it concludes: “Three of these four options – x-risk, Unfriendly AI, and alien exterminators – are very very bad for humanity. I think worry about this badness has been a lot of what’s driven interest in the Great Filter. I also think these are some of the least likely possible explanations, which means we should be less afraid of the Great Filter than is generally believed.” Yet a conclusion of almost exactly opposite tenor is merited. What has actually been demonstrated, if the arguments up to this point are accepted, is that the abstract threat of the Great Filter is significantly greater than has yet become conceivable. Our lucid nightmares are shown to fall short of it. The threat cannot be grasped as a known unknown.¹

This notion of x-risk is taken up by Thomas Moynihan in a book by that name, X-Risk: the steady growth of our own technological powers since the Industrial Revolution has been shadowed by an increasing fear of omnicide, the human-caused annihilation of all humans.² Robin Mackay in his introduction to Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh’s *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and the Future-in-Delirium* that will catalogue the mania we have for absolute annihilation tells us: “Omnicide therefore instigates its discourse on obsession, entrancement, excess, and delirium by entering the chaotic imaginations ... joining manic trajectories more insinuating and twisted than that straight line into the heart of darkness that is the unrequited death wish of an undead West.”³

“What could incite such mania to flare up into the lethal conviction that everything must be annihilated?” Mackay asks. In a suggestion rich with overtones of contemporary apocalypticism, Mohaghegh intimates that an alternative to the exhaustion of the West can only be found in such a ‘practicum of mania’, a practical apprenticeship in madness, a neomagical delirium that draws on the ‘inexhaustible reservoirs of fanaticism’, transmuting groundlessness from grey affectless postmodern haze into polychrome rapture, turning frustration at the collapse of truth and the proliferation of undecidable fictions into an opportunity to infuse the slightest inclination with the most intense commitment. In something like a kaleidoscopic serial refrain of Nietzsche’s eternal return, *Omnicide* tests our ability to withstand resorption into extremes whose virulence we would exclude, but to which we can formulate no effective riposte. For if nothing is true, as the

maxim of that 'order of free spirits par excellence' would have it, then the conclusion swiftly follows...and once everything is permitted, the tactics of willed illusion instigated by Hassan-i Sabbah lead us ineluctably to wonder how visionary unreality is converted into effective force. (Mackay)

As I suggested earlier such a world in which everything is permitted opens us to the Machiavellian Sadism of a posthuman trajectory of cruelty in which the impossible becomes possible. Georges Bataille once suggested "the direction of the future is only there in order to elude us." (Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*) He would also allude to the impossible future of the world-without-us: "Eroticism is the brink of the abyss. I'm leaning out over deranged horror (at this point my eyes roll back in my head). The abyss is the foundation of the possible. We're brought to the edge of the same abyss by uncontrolled laughter or ecstasy. From this comes a "questioning" of everything possible. This is the stage of rupture, of letting go of things, of looking forward to death."

We call this rupture the Singularity or the Death of the Human. What comes after is still to be decided. A pure abstraction of the "Outside". "Of course, a common trope of conspiratorial horror is the individual's lack of agency once parasitized by a constitutive xenoforce: one is stripped of agency and free will and, resultantly, becomes marionetted in and by a game too complex to be interpreted and too vast for agential intervention." 4 Nick Land describes abstract horror as: "Ontological density without identifiable form is abstract horror itself." He goes on to say, "If we could clearly envision the calamity that awaited us, it would be an object of terror. Instead, it is a shapeless threat, 'Outside' only in the abstract sense (encompassing the negative immensity of everything that we cannot grasp). It could be anywhere, from our genes or ecological dynamics, to the hidden laws of technological evolution, or the hostile vastnesses between the stars. We know only that, in strict proportion to the vitality of the cosmos, the probability of its existence advances towards inevitability, and that for us it means supreme ill." (ibid.)

It's this eerie feeling of apprehension surrounding the unknown as 'unknown' that is at the heart of abstract horrorism, a feeling that we know something is up with the world, that everything is out of whack, that there is something in the air, something indefinable yet felt that seems to haunt us not with its presence but its absence. We read weird tales, horror novels, murder mysteries, and crime stories because these writers for the most part give shape to our fears rather than leaving them in that abstract black hole of unknown and unknowable. Even when they cannot name the things they face, they still weave those things with just a sense of an unknowing knowing: the apophatic unnamable. We seem to need to put a name to the demon that haunts us even if it would mean our self-lacerating annihilation. To leave the 'thing' in some abstract unknown and unnamable blankness is to feel its dark and terrible presence in every shadow of our lives, as a continuous threat that seems to hover about us and in the future that is weaving its way toward us or alluring us toward its doom.

If civilization in its construction of culture is a vast sprawling security system and defense against time and the future, then we are in the midst of that moment when the security apparatus is breaking apart revealing in its wake the inevitable breach in the wall of time in which the alien

future has already arrived in our abstract present as the Cosmic Macabre.

We are destined to a fool's fate that deserves to be mocked. And since there is no one else around to do the mocking, we will take on the job. So let us indulge in cruel pleasures against ourselves and our pretensions, let us delight in the Cosmic Macabre. At least we may send up a few bitter laughs into the cobwebbed corners of this crusty old universe.

—Thomas Ligotti, *Songs of a Dead Dreamer*

1. Nick Land. Phyl-Undhu: Abstract Horror, Exterminator. Time Spiral Press. (December 20, 2014)
2. Moynihan, Thomas. X-Risk: How Humanity Discovered Its Own Extinction. Urbanomic (November 3, 2020)
3. Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh. Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and the Future-in-Delirium. Urbanomic/Sequence Press (June 11, 2019)
4. Andrew C. Wenaus, Literature of Exclusion : Dada, Data, and the Threshold of Electronic Literature.
5. taken from here: Machiavelli and Sade: Our Future as Pure Abstraction | Dr. Rinaldi's Horror Cabinet (wordpress.com)

← PREVIOUS NEXT →

META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER